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Published Version

Noble, P. (1999) Eyewitnesses of the fourth crusade - the war against Alexius III. Reading Medieval Studies, XXV. pp. 75-89. ISSN 0950-3129 Available at <http://centaur.reading.ac.uk/85262/>

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Eyewitnesses of the Fourth Crusade - the War against Alexius III

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There are three eyewitness accounts of the Fourth Crusade which cover some of the same events from different perspectives, and all of which were written within a few years of the events described.¹ Geoffroi de Villehardouin was a prominent member of the Fourth Crusade and probably an experienced crusader. He was clearly deeply involved in most of the councils, in the negotiations between the crusaders and the Venetians as well as the negotiations between the crusaders and the Greeks. He was privy to many, if not all, the decisions taken by the crusade's leaders. His account is therefore based on first-hand information, and he seems to have had access to at least some of the official documents when dictating his narrative.² He composed it almost certainly after the death of Boniface de Montferrat in 1207 and probably before Henri de Valenciennes began his account of the campaigns of the Emperor Henri in late 1208.³ Robert de Clari was a petty knight from Picardy, a follower of Pierre d'Amiens, whose account reveals the gulf between the leaders and the ordinary crusaders. His naive amazement at the marvels of Constantinople shows the relative lack of sophistication of the majority of the Westerners participating in the Crusade, who were amazed by the size and splendour of the city as Villehardouin confirms (CCC LXXXII-XCII; CCV 128). He gives an insight into the issues that occupied the rank and file and the misapprehensions and rumours that circulated amongst them. His account is more difficult to date than the other two as it could have been written either after 1216, the date of the death of the Emperor Henri which he mentions, or in 1205 soon after his return home, with an epilogue covering in a very brief fashion the events up to 1216 when he heard of the death of Henri. Given the detail of the account, it seems probable that the earlier date is the more likely.⁴ Nicetas Choniates was a high-ranking Greek civil servant, educated in the classical tradition and a helpless spectator of the fall of the Constantinople, which he saw as a punishment for the faults of its

inhabitants and in particular its leaders.⁵ His history, most of which was written in the reign of Alexius III, continues up to 1206-7 and is probably the closest in time to the actual events discussed here.⁶

The diversion of the Fourth Crusade to Constantinople was agreed after the attack on Zara, and Villehardouin's account makes it clear that the decision was in effect a coup by the leaders, such as the Marquis of Montferrat and the Counts of Flanders, Blois and St Pol who announced that they would be shamed if they did not accept the offer of the exiled Greek Prince, Alexius, son of the deposed Emperor Isaac (CCV 98). He makes no mention of any part played in this announcement by the Doge of Venice which is surprising, given the prominent role usually taken in the councils of the crusaders by the Doge. According to Clari, who was not, of course, party to the decision because of his relatively lowly rank, it was the Doge who persuaded the crusaders to accept the offer of Prince Alexius (CCC XXXIX). Nicetas depicts the young man as the pawn of the Venetians who were plotting the downfall of his uncle to avenge their injuries.⁷ The leading role of the Venetians is thus confirmed by two of the three texts. Although this plot was apparently common knowledge in Constantinople, Alexius III had made no effort to prepare for a possible attack (OCB 296). Villehardouin's silence on the role of the Doge is significant, all the more so in view of the comments by Clari and Nicetas. It seems inconceivable that a personality as forceful as the Doge did not take a prominent part in the decision, but Villehardouin prefers to present the decision as one taken for reasons of feudal honour and justice.⁸ The barons agree to restore Prince Alexius to the lands which are rightfully his, and in return he will support the army with men and money. This theme of feudal justice is one which Villehardouin will continue to use in his presentation of the diversion to Constantinople and is no doubt designed to appeal to his most likely audience, the nobles of northern France and Flanders.

Clari makes the point that the diversion was sanctioned by the Bishops who approved the justice of the cause, the restoration of the rightful heir (CCC XXXIX). Villehardouin is most revealing here on the disagreements between the churchmen who were accompanying the crusade as he describes the arguments between the Abbot of Vaux and the Abbot of Loos, commenting that it was no wonder that the laymen were divided when the clerics were at loggerheads amongst themselves (CCV 97). For Clari, however, once the Bishops had

sanctified the expedition, the intervening events seem to have been of little interest. He tells us nothing about any of the incidents which happened between Zara and Constantinople. Nicetas, less surprisingly, also has little to say on this period, but he comments that only after the proclamation of Prince Alexius as emperor at Epidamnus (Durazzo) did Alexius III wake up to the threat. During the previous months he had made no attempt to stockpile weapons or repair the warships which had been allowed to rot in the harbour because of apathy and embezzlement. Belatedly he started to repair the twenty or so vessels still available and to pull down the houses nearest to the city walls (OCB 296-7).

Villehardouin, however, treats the voyage from Zara to Constantinople as an episode of considerable importance. Not only does he treat briefly the episode at Durazzo where the townspeople swore allegiance to Prince Alexiūs, but he describes very fully the dissension within the army at Corfu where many were ready to abandon the army to go directly to the Holy Land (CCV 111-118). Only the personal appeal of Boniface and other leaders persuaded them to stay. They imposed strict conditions on the leaders, however, which were not subsequently adhered to. It is noticeable that some very important people participated in this revolt, Jacques d'Avesnes, Guy de Coucy, Pierre d'Amiens etc., some of whom later played leading roles in the conquest of Greece.⁹ Their departure would have seriously weakened the crusade, and it is no wonder that the leaders were prepared to accept almost any terms to keep them. All three chroniclers agree that the voyage to Constantinople was swift and easy, but only Villehardouin mentions the attack on Andros by part of the fleet led by Boniface and Baldwin who extorted considerable sums from the inhabitants in return for peace (CCV 123).¹⁰

The Western chroniclers agree on the wonderful sight that Constantinople presented, but Nicetas remarks that the Greeks showed little interest in the arrival of the fleet. The opposition to the landing at Chalcedon was completely ineffective, and the nearest Greek troops fled when challenged. His account of this episode is confirmed by Villehardouin. The embassy of Nicolas Roux to Boniface in which Alexius III offered generous terms mingled with threats if the crusaders did not accept them is mentioned only by Villehardouin. The sarcastic speech of refusal attributed to Conon de Bethune picks up the theme of feudal rights which Villehardouin had used earlier in connection with

the claims of Prince Alexius (CCV144). Clari would not have been involved in the negotiations and gives no details, although he does refer to an offer of silver and gold from Alexius III (CCC XLI).¹¹ Nicetas knows nothing of the debates within the crusader camp and does not mention the attempt by the crusaders to rouse the citizens against Alexius III by parading the young prince past the walls of the city, a suggestion of the Doge according to Clari (CCC XLI). The description in Villehardouin continues the theme of feudal justice as the crusaders call on the Greeks to return to their rightful allegiance, an appeal to which, he says, the Greeks were too frightened to respond. Clari, on the other hand, reports that the Greeks shouted back that they knew nothing of the young man and did not recognise him, an explanation which seems rather more convincing (CCC XLI).

Nicetas, who has the unenviable task of explaining the defeat of his fellowcountrymen, sees the failure of the Greeks to counter-attack as a prime cause in encouraging the Latins to press home their attack (OCB 297). Clari has nothing to say on the councils which preceded the first attack, and the order of events in his narrative and that of Villehardouin reflects the difference in their positions in the army. Villehardouin reports the agreement on the order of battle which corresponds pretty much to that of Clari who does not, however, give his order of battle until the actual battle several days later, as he would not have been party to the discussions, which were probably not very amicable (CCV 147-53, CCC XLV). Unlike Villehardouin, Clari comments on the atmosphere of fear in the army when the attack on the shore is mooted (CCC XLI).

The capture of the tower of Galata is treated very differently by the three writers. Nicetas, as a non-combatant, notes the brevity and inefficacy of the Greek resistance, which resulted in the loss of the tower and the whole of the harbour and the north shore of the Golden Horn, whose defenders offered some brief resistance at the bridge across the harbour before fleeing across it and breaking it down behind them (OCB 297). Both Villehardouin and Clari indicate the religious nature of the expedition by mentioning the role of the bishops who insisted that the crusaders make wills and go to confession before the battle (CCV154, CCC XLI).¹² After that, however, they differ on the details. Clari comments on the role of the crossbowmen who clear the shore for the knights to ride out mounted in full armour from the ships. Villehardouin does not mention the crossbowmen and is quite

clear that the knights jumped fully armed into the water and waded ashore at which point they lowered their lances, whereupon the Greeks fled. Only then were the horses brought out from the ships. Neither chronicler was writing at the time of the events described, but it is always possible that both were correct as they could have been describing different sections of the attack. Clari's description of the capture of the Tower of Galata and the harbour is brief, whereas Villehardouin is much fuller, making it clear that the Tower was captured the day after the landing and after fierce resistance by the defenders, whose sortie from the Tower backfired (CCV 160). Possibly he is magnifying the Greek resistance to make the victory seem more impressive, as Nicetas was not impressed by the defence offered by the Greeks.¹³ Villehardouin's account of an aggressive tactic which went wrong is very convincing. The Latins pursued the retreating Greeks so closely that they were unable to close the doors to prevent the entry of the Latins who captured the Tower with considerable slaughter. The boost to the morale of the crusaders was considerable and was matched by the depression felt by the people of Constantinople. The following day the chain across the harbour mouth was broken and the harbour captured and cleared of any Greek ships.

Both men agree that the battle plan was for the Venetians to attack by sea and the crusaders by land, but they disagree on what happened at the bridge where Villehardouin says that the crusaders were amazed at the lack of resistance, while Clari says that the Greeks did attempt to defend the bridge but were driven back. Nicetas confirms that there was some fighting at the bridge (CCV 163, CCC XLIV, OCB 297).¹⁴ The scale of the undertaking is made clear by Villehardouin's comment that the army was big enough to lay siege to only one of the city's gates, but the lack of leadership and the low morale on the Greek side were clearly crucial. Nicetas suggests that Alexius III had already decided on flight when the crusaders set up camp opposite the Palace of Blachernae, before any serious fighting had taken place (OCB 298). The Emperor offered no resistance and did not take up arms, although his friends and kinsmen did make sorties to harry the crusaders, which is confirmed by Villehardouin who paints a picture of an army under constant attack. Clari mentions none of this, although Nicetas says 'our deeds were not ignoble'. (p.298 [544]).¹⁵ He also mentions infantry attacks on the crusaders. Villehardouin, however, says that the Greeks suffered heavy losses in these skirmishes and, as events of

particular significance, mentions the capture of Constantine Lascaris by the Burgundians and the prowess of Pierre de Bracheux whose quarters were nearest the gate and who was therefore involved in most of the skirmishes (CCV 167-9).¹⁶

It took the crusaders ten days to prepare their all-out attack. Nicetas says that they had decided to try an attack and, if that failed, to negotiate. He describes the attack from the land with the battering ram and the crossbowmen in the van. The heavy-armed troops with the ram broke through the wall into the city where they met fierce resistance from the Pisans, who were the enemies of the Venetians, and the 'ax-bearing barbarians' (OCB 298), presumably the Varangian Guards. There is no mention of Greeks, but the Latins were driven back with many wounded. On the sea front, however, where the Venetians were higher than the walls so that they could fire down on them, they were easily able to drive the defenders back and occupy part of the walls, after which they set fire to part of the city. According to Nicetas the fire destroyed the whole quarter from the hill of Blachernae to the Deuteron quarter (OCB 298). Villehardouin's account is very close to that of Nicetas. He too mentions that English and Danish mercenaries manned the walls under attack by the crusaders and that the Greek forces succeeded in driving the attackers back. He does not, however, mention the Pisans (CCV 171). The initial Venetian attacks were also unsuccessful but the leadership of the Doge was such that his men followed him ashore, and there followed the reported miracle when the banner of St Mark was seen to fly from one of the defensive towers, although no-one knew how it had got there.

173. Or porroiz oïr estrange proesce; que li dux de Venise, qui vialz hom ere et gote ne veoit, fu toz armez, el chief de la soe galie, et ot le gonfanon Saint Marc pardevant lui; et escριοit as suens que il li meïssent à terre, ou se ce non il feroit jutise de lor cors. Et il si firent; que la galie prent terre, et il saillent fors; si portent le confanon Saint Marc pardevant lui à la terre.

174. Et quant li Venisien voient le confanon Saint Marc à la terre, et la galie lor seignor qui ot terre prise devant als, si se tint chascuns à honi, et vont à la terre tuit; et cil des uissiers saillent fors et vont à la terre, et cil des granz nés entrent es

barges et vont à la terre, qui ainz ainz, qui mielz mielz. Lors veïssiez assaut grant et merveillox; et ce tesmoigne Joffrois de Vile-Harduin li mareschais de Champaigne, qui ceste ovre traïta, que plus de quarante li distrent por verité que il virent le confanon Saint Marc de Venise en une des tors, et mie ne sorent qui l'i porta.

According to him the Venetians captured twenty-five towers but for once Alexius reacted promptly and sent large forces against them, so that it was impossible for them to withstand the Greek counter-attack. They therefore started the fire as a defensive measure to cover their withdrawal.

All three chroniclers agree that at this point Alexius III finally mobilised his forces and led his army out against the crusaders. Nicetas describes him as moved by the plight of the city, while the mob which had been infuriated by his lack of forethought insulted him, angered by the fact that for the first time the enemy was attacking the walls of the city. Alexius must have been only too well aware of the power of the city mob when roused and realised that his position was endangered by both external and internal threats. Nicetas detected alarm amongst the Latins at the size of the Greek army which, according to him, contained the flower of their troops and which, with proper leadership, could have routed the enemy. Certainly the accounts of the crusaders confirm that they were very aware of the seriousness of the danger in which they were. The cowardice of Alexius's advisors meant that the army withdrew pursued by the triumphant Latins, and the position was immeasurably worsened.¹⁷ Villehardouin confirms most of the account of Nicetas with extra details available to a participant. The two armies in fact faced each other within shooting distance. The Latins were drawn up with their backs to the palisade which defended their camp so that they could not be attacked from the rear and refused to advance towards the Greeks as otherwise their small forces would have been drowned in the sea of men opposing them. Villehardouin's estimate is that they had six divisions opposing at least forty,¹⁸ all bigger than the crusading divisions, which may simply mean an overwhelming force (CCV 179). The position was so desperate that when the Doge heard of it, he ordered the Venetians to abandon their conquered towers and sail to the aid of the Latins. To the pious Villehardouin the retreat of the Greeks could only be due to God's

will, reinforcing yet another theme of his narrative - that the crusade could have been successful only because God wished it to be so, when the odds against it were so overwhelming.

Et sachiez que onques Diex ne traist de plus grant peril nule
gent con il fist cels de l'ost cel jor; et sachiez qu'il n'i ot si
hardi qui n'aüst grant joie. (CCV 181)

The retreat of the Greeks allowed the weary crusaders to return to the camp, take off their armour and eat and drink what they could find, for the supplies were running very short. It would have been the ideal opportunity for a Greek counter-attack had there been a commander of vision and energy on their side.

Clari devotes much more space to this episode, almost certainly because he was in the squadron of Pierre d'Amiens and thus for once right in the thick of the action. He omits all the fighting before the advance of Alexius III against the crusaders, although he describes the preparations and confirms the description of the ships given by Nicetas. His battle order is almost the same as that of Villehardouin, although he has the squadrons in a different order and adds that the cooks and grooms were armed as well who struck terror in the Greeks because of their fearsome appearance.

et les garchons et les quisiniers mist on par devers le cité,
encontre les gens a pié l'empereur qui estoient rengié contrevail
les murs. Quant le pietaille l'empereur virent no menu gent si
laidement armee, si en eurent si grand peur et si grant hisde que
onques ne s'oserent mouvoir, ne venir vers aus, ne onques de
chele part n'eut l'os warde. (CCC XLV)

He gives a much fuller account than Villehardouin of the manoeuvring of the armies as three squadrons of crusaders advance to attack the Emperor, but the advisors of Baldwin who was leading felt that it was dangerous to attack so far from the camp and wanted him to turn back. The Count of St Pol and Pierre d'Amiens did not want to turn their squadron in second place back, however, and continued the advance, which, Baldwin feared, would shame him. He therefore continued the advance, as otherwise his knights threatened to renounce their allegiance to him (CCC XLVIII). Clari mentions here that the ladies

of Constantinople who were watching from the walls thought that the Franks were as beautiful as angels in their armour. How he knows this is unclear.¹⁹ Both sides advanced with their crossbowmen firing, and between them was a small rise in the ground which they had to climb. The Franks reached the top first and halted, afraid to advance further as they would then be out of sight of their camp. Before they had taken any decision, however, the Emperor withdrew his forces into the city without any further attempt to fight. Neither Clari nor Villehardouin mention any attempt by the Franks to pursue the Greeks in the way described by Nicetas.²⁰ Like Villehardouin Clari says that the army went back to the camp to disarm and engage in mutual congratulation with the Venetians. The uproar in the city was so great, however, that it could be heard in the camp as the Emperor was warned that either he fought against the Franks or the people would turn to Prince Alexius to make him emperor.

All the chroniclers agree that that night Alexius III fled from Constantinople. Clari says that he took as many people with him as he could (CCC LI). Villehardouin, no doubt better informed, mentions that he took all the money and valuables with him that he could (CCV 182). Nicetas, even better informed, claims that his flight hastened the destruction of the city. Alexius III fled with his daughter, Irene, his gold and his gems, thinking only of himself. From the moment that he returned to the city, he had thought only of his flight and self-preservation. He thought of neither his wife nor his children nor the city (OCB 299). Summing him up Nicetas has nothing to add to his description of him in warfare. He is critical of him as an administrator though not very harshly. He had his good points - mild, accessible, avoiding slanderers and flatterers. He was neither cruel nor rude, but he was womanish and fled though driven away by no-one. It was the misfortune of the Byzantines to be ruled by effete and dissolute emperors (OCB 299-300).

Thus Nicetas makes it clear more by implication than direct statement that Alexius III was the principal author of his own downfall, although he also blames the cowardice of his advisors. His failure to prepare for the arrival of the crusaders which he was well warned to expect compounded the years of neglect and corruption which had reduced the once proud fleet to a useless remnant.²¹ Once the Frankish army had arrived, the total failure of Alexius to offer any form of leadership raised the morale of the invaders and dispirited his

own people. Without even any attempt to offer serious resistance Alexius abandoned the city, his throne and part of his family to seek safety elsewhere. It is clear from the accounts of both Clari and Villehardouin that any serious counter-attack by the Greeks could have caused the crusaders serious problems. There was no attempt to use their overwhelming numbers. There was no attempt to blockade the camps and prevent the crusaders from getting food or water, which Villehardouin admits were in extremely short supply (CCV 165). The resistance to the landings of the crusaders when they were at their most vulnerable was feeble in the extreme according to Nicetas. For Nicetas this is all part of his vision of the fate of Byzantium as the fitting punishment for the City of God which no longer deserved its position. His attitude is almost fatalistic to the fall of the city which has brought its destruction on itself and is deservedly punished.²²

Villehardouin also sees the fall of Constantinople as a part of God's scheme of things. The success of the crusaders proves that they are carrying out God's will, punishing the schismatic and deceitful Greeks who have rejected their true ruler and accepted a usurper.²³ The overwhelming odds which the crusaders faced are a further proof of the intervention of God on the side of the crusaders. A close comparison of Villehardouin's account with that of Nicetas shows the accuracy of his description of events, but a comparison of his account with that of Clari also reveals how closely Villehardouin is linked to the Doge and the Venetians. Their role in the successful attacks on the city is described only in his account.²⁴ Clari is also not without his favourites. The tactical manoeuvres against Alexius's army show a clear interest in giving full credit to the squadron of the Count of St Pol and Pierre d'Amiens, which is absent from the account of Villehardouin. This can, of course, be explained, by the fact that Villehardouin was in a different squadron in a different part of the battlefield, but it is nonetheless significant that Clari shows very clearly how competitive and in a way disorganised the crusaders were. Each squadron was jealous of its position. The squadrons were operating independently and only cooperating when it suited them. Feudal honour and personal interest were as important to those participating as the common interest. A determined attack at a moment of such confusion could have wreaked havoc as the crusaders hesitated and changed tack before finally deciding to stick to the original plan. The total failure of the Greeks to exploit any such opportunities

reflects very poorly on their leadership and their military awareness. Cavalry squadrons are at their most vulnerable when manoeuvring or when orders are changed. The complete failure of the leading crusaders to coordinate their movements must have meant that there were men and horses milling about uncertain of the next move and probably out of formation. An experienced or daring commander could have seized the initiative from the crusaders, but there was no-one on the Greek side to give a lead.

The three accounts are both complementary and, by and large, consistent. The details vary as is inevitable, since the rank and nationality of the men are different and their access to information was very different. They were all writing after the events described although not very long after, at most ten or eleven years if the later date for Clari is accepted. Between the three of them it is possible to construct a reasonably complete picture of the course of this episode in the crusade. All three show the total collapse of leadership on the Greek side. Alexius III defeated himself. Had he shown any courage or tactical sense, he could have probably overwhelmed the crusaders. Instead he chose flight when the war was far from lost. His inadequacy as a ruler and a leader was cruelly shown by his response or more accurately lack of response to the crusade. The chroniclers also show the lack of organisation and unity on the crusading side. Faced with overwhelming odds and in an extremely dangerous situation the crusaders were still capable of jeopardising their cause. Their total failure to understand their enemy is shown by their attempt to win over the Greeks to Prince Alexius by appeals to their sense of feudal honour, a concept completely alien to the Greeks.²⁵ It was an important justification for the war in the eyes of at least some of the Latins, however, which with the backing of the churchmen on the crusade made it possible for them to argue that the war was morally defensible. The difficulty of their situation is shown by the shortage of food and water which they constantly faced. They were all the time within a hair's breadth of defeat and they must have known it; hence their faith in and their gratitude to God for rescuing them from what seemed like impossible positions. Their own courage and fighting skill, the quality of their leadership on the battlefield and their motivation must also be taken into account. From the accounts of the three chroniclers it is possible to appreciate to some extent the reasons for the conflict as they appeared to the participants and to see how a

sophisticated society weakened by corruption and incompetence fell before the attack of a younger, harder society inspired by dislike of the Greeks and an arrogant sense of its own superiority.

NOTES

¹ A version of this paper was given at the 1999 Jerusalem Conference for the Society for the History of the Crusades and the Latin East where it was read for me by Dr Karen Pratt, whom I would like to thank for her kindness. I am grateful to Dr Marianne Ailes, Dr Françoise Le Saux and my wife for their help and comments. All references are to the following texts or translations: *Robert de Clari*, edited by P. Lauer, Paris, Champion, CFMA 40, 1924 (ref. to as CCC followed by paragraph number in Roman); Geoffroy de Villehardouin, *La Conquête de Constantinople*, ed. Jean Dufournet, Paris, Garnier-Flammarion, 1969 (ref. to as CCV followed by paragraph number in Arabic); Nicetas Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, transl. H.G. Magoulias, Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1984 (ref. to as OCB followed by page number in Arabic).

² Villehardouin, *La Conquête de Constantinople*, ed. E. Faral, 2 vols., Paris, Les Classiques de l'histoire du moyen âge, 1961. Vol. i, p.xiv. 'Mais, si Villehardouin a composé son livre comme des mémoires et non pas comme un journal, s'il a repris d'ensemble une série d'événements dont le cours a rempli une dizaine d'années, la précision et l'exactitude de son récit prouvent qu'il travaillait documents en main et peut-être aussi d'après des notes personnelles.' (Hereafter Faral).

³ Faral, p.xviii; 'Quand il [Villehardouin] composa son ouvrage, au plus tôt en 1208...'

⁴ E.H. McNeal, *The Conquest of Constantinople; translated from the old French of Robert de Clari*, New York: Octagon Books, 1966, p.7, prefers 1216.

⁵ 'The supine and stay-at-home ministers of the Roman empire ushered in the pirates as judges to condemn and punish us.' (OCB 322)

⁶ J.A. van Dieten, *Nicetae Choniatae Historia*, Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae, Vol. XI/I Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1975, Vol. I pp.xciii-ix.

⁷ 'As they [the Venetians] were all-cunning in their ways and trouble-makers, they laid hold of Alexios, who was juvenile in mind rather than in age, and prevailed upon him to agree under oath to demands which were impossible to fulfill.' (OCB 296)

⁸ See CCV 92 where the ambassadors of Philip of Swabia are reported by Villehardouin as requesting the crusaders to restore the disinherited heir to his property. Clari (CCV XXXIII) reports that the Doge urged support for the rightful heir.

⁹ J. Longnon, *Les Compagnons de Villehardouin; recherches sur les croisés de la quatrième croisade*, Hautes Etudes Médiévales et Modernes 30, Genève; Droz, 1978, gives full details of these and the other crusaders mentioned by Villehardouin.

¹⁰ Clari was probably not part of the expedition to Andros, and Nicetas was far away in the capital and no doubt knew nothing about the raid.

¹¹ This is presumably the same offer as that made by the envoy of Alexius III, Nicolas Rous in Villehardouin 143, 'Se vos iestes povre ne diseteus, il vos donra volentiers de ses viandes et de son avoir, et vos li vuidiez sa terre.' Clari may have been reporting the sort of exaggerated rumour that would spread through the army amongst those excluded from the parleys.

¹² Clari does not mention the making of wills, saying instead that they all received communion. This was no doubt standard practice but the fact that both chroniclers bother to mention it shows the importance attached to the religious aspect of the crusade. General confession is also mentioned in the letter of the Count of Saint Pol. (Faral, p.153, note 4).

¹³ 'It was a sight to behold the defenders fleeing after a brief resistance.' (OCB 297) The discrepancy between the account of Nicetas and that of Villehardouin is not surprising given that the former was almost certainly a participant in the fighting while Nicetas was presumably watching from the other side of the harbour. He is therefore only concerned with the outcome which was disastrous for the Greeks.

¹⁴ Villehardouin: '...et nus de la cité n'issi fors encontre als, et fu mult granz merveille'; Clari: 'Et quand il vinrent au pont, li Griu y vinrent qui leur contredissent le passage tant comme il peurent, et tant que li pelerin les encachierent par forche de bataille et passarent'; Nicetas: '...the Latins... appeared [10-11 July 1203] before Kosmidion, where they met some slight resistance from the Romans around the bridge located nearby.'

¹⁵ The figure in square brackets refers to Van Dieten's edition.

¹⁶ Longnon, p. 92. 'Pierre de Bracheux fut le héros incontesté de la croisade, célèbre pour sa bravoure et ses exploits aussi bien chez les ennemis grecs ou bulgares que parmi les croisés. "Che fu, dit Robert de Cléry, au début de son récit, chis de povres et de rikes qui plus y fist de

proeschies." Et à la prise de Constantinople, il redit cet éloge: "Che fu chis qui tous les autres passa, et haus et bas, que il n'en i eut onques nul qui tant i fesist d'armes ne de proeches de son cors comme fist Pierres de Braiechoel". Nicétas, de son côté, l'appelle un "homme à la force héroïque". "Il l'emportait sur tous les autres, écrit-il encore, et il était le plus renommé pour sa valeur"; et ailleurs: "il se distinguait par la grandeur prodigieuse de son corps et était célèbre pour la noble fermeté de son âme".

¹⁷ 'Indeed, a work of deliverance would have been wrought had the emperor's troops moved in one body against the enemy, but now the nagging idea of flight and the faintheartedness of those about him thwarted Alexios from what needed to be done. To the joy of the Romans, he drew up the troops in battle array and moved out, ostensibly to oppose the Latins, but he returned in utter disgrace, having only made the enemy more haughty and insolent.' (OCB 299)

¹⁸ In Dufournet's edition of Villehardouin the reading is 'quarante' but in Faral's it is 'soixante'. In this instance Dufournet seems to have followed the reading of the manuscripts of Group II (mss. B,C,D,E) whereas Faral argued that the readings of Group I (mss O and A) were better. See Faral pp. xliv-li. Dufournet does not explain why he prefers the Group II reading.

¹⁹ 'Et les dames et les demiseles du palais estoient montees as fenestres, et autres gens de la cité, et dames et demiseles, estoient montees as murs de le chité, et esgarديوient chevauchier chele bataille et l'empereur d'autre part, et disoient entr'ax que che sanloit des noes que che fussent angle, si erent il bel, pour chou qu'il estoient si belement armé et leur cheval si belement couvert.' (CCC XLVII) Clari does not make it clear how he knows that this was the reaction of the Greek women. It is possible that he deduced that the Greeks were frightened by the appearance of the cooks and scullions from their reactions (above), but the idea that the Greek women were overwhelmed by Frankish male beauty seems to belong more to the *chanson de geste* and the topos of the 'belle Sarrazine'.

²⁰ One possible explanation for this discrepancy is that the pursuers were only a handful of undisciplined knights and that neither Clari nor Villehardouin thought that they were of any importance.

²¹ Ahrweiler, H. *Byzance et la mer*, Bibliothèque byzantine - Etudes V, Paris, PUF, 1966, p. 272.

²² 'Justice appeared without the sound of footfall or handclap as a zealous avenger, fell silently and inaudibly upon the city, and made of us the most ill-starred of men.' (OCB 322)

²³ See the address by the crusaders to the people of Constantinople. 'Car cil cui vos obéissiez cum à signor, vos tient à tort et à pechié, contre Dieu et contre raison.' (CCV 146).

²⁴ Elsewhere in his account (for example in his description of the siege of Zara) Villehardouin also omits details which are unfavourable to the Venetians.

²⁵ D.E Queller and T.F. Madden, *The Fourth Crusade; The Conquest of Constantinople, 1210-4*, 2nd edition Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996, pp. 110-114. The crusaders were taken by surprise when the Greeks did not welcome them as liberators trying to restore the rightful heir to his throne. Clari and Villehardouin both make it clear that part of the justification of the expedition was the argument that it would defend the rights of the true heir.